

Who “likes” public education: Social media activism, middle-class parents, and education policy in Israel

Amit Avigur-Eshel

Department of Political Science, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel

and

Izhak Berkovich

Department of Education and Psychology, The Open University of Israel, Ra'anana, Israel

Abstract

The present paper focuses on middle-class parent activism in the Israeli policymaking arena. In recent decades, public education governance in Israel has been gradually moving from a quasi-social democratic mode to a neoliberal one. Two e-mobilizations of middle-class parents are studied: the “Strollers Protest” of 2011 and the “Sardines Protest” of 2014. First, we explore how these two protests used social media to promote changes in education policies. Next, we argue that social media can be used to promote both anti- and pro-neoliberal policies in public education. We conclude by discussing the possible implications of social media on parent activism in the policy arena.

Keywords: activism; Israel; middle class; neoliberalism; parents; social media.

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1. Introduction

Twice in recent years, Israel's networked public sphere (Tufekci 2017) was the scene for the mobilization of aggrieved middle-class parents who protested against government education policies. The Strollers Protest, of 2011, was against rising early-age education and childcare expenses; the Sardines Protest, of 2014, was aimed against increasing the number of students per classroom. Demands were articulated, demonstrations convened, and thousands participated. Activist parents, prominently women, relied heavily on social media platforms, primarily Facebook, to voice their demands and to organize and mobilize supporters.

Parent participation is usually treated as a local phenomenon: parents take part in school-related processes or help establish new schools (Gofen and Blomqvist 2014). Middle-class parents have been found to be prominent participants, using available resources to promote their interests and agenda through local activism (Ball 1997; Posey-Maddox 2016; Matthews and Hastings 2013). Scholars have paid much less attention to trans-local activism, i.e., parent participation in the policy arena, made possible by the rise of the Internet, and even more so, by the spread of social media, which have provided parents with new opportunities for activism (Zuckerman 2014).

Research on online social activism in education is scarce (Berkovich 2011), and to the best of our knowledge, parent online activism did not receive scholarly attention at all. Therefore, the first aim of this study is to explore how middle-class parents use social media to influence policymaking in education. In Israel, social media activism takes place at a time of transition from one mode of governance¹ in

¹ Howlett, (2009, p. 76) defines mode of governance as a favored cluster of government goals and instruments, with a specific underlying logic.

public education to another. In recent decades, Israel went through a profound change, from a quasi-social democratic society to a neoliberal one. Neoliberal values and practices have gained increased legitimacy among the Israeli public and have guided education policy toward a “post-bureaucratic” model that emphasizes decentralization, individual choice, privatization, and competition (Avigur-Eshel 2014; Berkovich 2014). Our second aim follows from this reality. Protest in the neoliberal era is usually seen as a means of resistance to neoliberalism, used by oppressed, subordinated, peripheral, and radical groups (e.g., Huke, Clua-Losada, and Bailey 2015). We use the two protests to show that middle-class parents can promote both anti- and pro-neoliberal policies through social media activism.

The article is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on parent participation in public education and on the ways that class structure and the neoliberal transformation affect it. Second, we explore the rise of social media activism from two perspectives of social movement theory: resource mobilization and framing. Third, we provide background information on the education system, parent participation, and class structure in Israel. Fourth, we present the two protest cases and discuss methodological issues. Fifth, we compare the use of Facebook as a resource and in the framing of demands in the two cases.

2. Parent participation in public education: Roles, class, and ideology

Parent participation in education takes place in three arenas: (a) within schools, by taking part in school decisions; (b) between schools, by establishing new and innovative schools; and (c) across schools, by seeking to influence policy. The first arena is dominated by the co-production approach, as parents partner with the state

and share responsibility for the education process under existing education policies (Gofen and Blomqvist 2014). In the between-schools arena, parents take a more adversarial approach and reject the social contract with the state, refuse to comply with existing education policies, and opt out of public education, taking charge of educational administration (Gofen 2012). In the across-schools arena, parents become activists, advocating or opposing policy issues within the public and political spheres. Most studies of parent participation concern one of the first two arenas, placing the emphasis on local involvement. Studies concerned with the across-schools arena, which emphasize the trans-local organization of parents' collectives, are rare (e.g., Fuchs and Fuchs 1994).

Parent participation in any arena cannot be understood without reference to class and the neoliberal context in which class relations are currently embedded. Some studies have shown that schools produce differences in participation across class lines (e.g., Fine 1993); others have emphasized parents' use of the resources available to them (e.g., Ball 1997). Both perspectives point to low participation rates among the working class and high capabilities of middle-class parents to take action. Matthews and Hastings' (2013) recent review of middle-class activism suggests that by being proactive, both as individuals and in collectives, members of the middle class are able to divert state resources from public services to serve their interests. This effect, however, is contingent to some degree on policy and social context.

The turn toward neoliberalism has redefined class-school relations. Increasing reliance on the market and market logic, and the retrenchment of public services (Benski et al. 2013) are the background against which middle-class parents adopted more proactive modes of operation in the within-school and between-schools arenas (Posey-Maddox 2016). Some of these actions, such as school fundraising, have

actively contributed to the neoliberalization of schools (Posy-Maddox 2016). Among working-class parents, some have come to support market-based solutions such as voucher schools. But as Pedroni argued, this is not a result of the internalization of neoliberal principles, but it is “rooted in collective struggles over resource distribution and cultural autonomy along lines of race (and class)” (Pedroni 2006, 276).

Neoliberal entrepreneurs among the political elite have promoted individualism, most prominently through the discourse of empowerment, which presents parents and teachers as powerful actors in a decentralized and (semi-) privatized environment (Vincent 1996). Thus, this discourse undermines collective action. At the same time, technological innovations may offer new paths for collective action, even in the neoliberal context of hyper-individualism and hyper-consumerism (Earl and Kimport 2011). Education researchers have not engaged intensively with the ways in which the Internet affects collective action (for exceptions, see Berkovich 2011), and to the best of our knowledge, have not looked at all into the ways in which social media serves as a platform for parents’ collective action under neoliberalism.

3. Social media and social movement theory

Social media has played a central role in the mobilization and operation of social movements in the second decade of the 21st century in a range of socio-political issues (e.g., Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2016; Giglou, Ogan and d’Haenens 2017). To investigate the underexplored phenomenon of parent social media activism, we turn to social movement theory and briefly discuss how the rise of social media affected the formation and action of social movements.

Social movement theory provides two main perspectives for explaining the formation of social movements: resource mobilization and framing.² Resource mobilizationists argue that various types of resources are vital for collective action. Without sufficient money, legitimacy, organization, and people, social movements do not rise (Cress and Snow 1996). Framists argue that collective action is generated through the “production and maintenance of meaning” (Benford and Snow 2000). Ideas and frames simplify reality, point at what is wrong and what is to be done about it, and provide motivations for action. One of the most common frames is that of injustice (Gamson 1992). This frame is central to motivating action because it helps construct the collective that is affected by injustice – the “we” – and provides reasons for mobilization.

The expansion of the Internet, and particularly the rise of social media, have deeply affected social movements, from both perspectives. From the resource mobilization perspective, the Internet and social media have lowered the cost of communication, technically and financially. They have also provided new capabilities for movements to manage their organization and reach out to supporters, i.e., to mobilize them (Benkler et al. 2015; Vatikiotis and Yörük 2016). A wide debate has emerged about the effects of social media on social movement mobilization. Optimists argue that social media eases contact and communication between people, facilitating mobilization, empowers individuals and gives them a sense of political efficacy. Pessimists agree that digital tools make citizens’ participation and public expression easier, but argue that this participation suffers from weak ties between members, who are likely to be less dedicated to the cause, and reinforces existing

² The resource mobilization perspective is often combined with an analysis of the political opportunity structure. Although we do not discuss this line of analysis directly, we used it to guide our presentation of the Israeli context.

participation inequalities (Koc-Michalska, Lillecker and Vedel 2016). Various scholars have adopted a more complex position that identifies both positive and negative effects of social media on social movement resources, particularly on mobilization. They consider the easy mobilization and weak ties as two sides of the same coin, with similar analytical weight. Massive and rapid mobilization may have a considerable effect on the public sphere, public debate, and policy, but its horizontal and dispersed organizational structure makes it less sustainable for long campaigns (Tufekci 2017).

From the framing perspective, social media can affect both the generation and dissemination of ideas and frames. Social media, and the Internet more generally, has made the publication of units of meaning easier for social movements, and made possible a larger circulation than before (Benkler et al. 2015). Social media also changed the discursive processes that underlie the formation of frames and ideas of social movements (Benford and Snow 2000). The dialogic character of social media platforms (Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar 2014) enables social movements to increase dramatically the number of participants in the production of frames and ideas. It also makes it possible for a more heterogeneous group to take part in the process, as leaders, activists, and supporters join the discussions. Gerbaudo's (2012) "choreography of assembly" touches on the effects of social media on both resource mobilization and the production of meaning, as it includes the organization and direction of supporters, as well as a "narration" that explains why they come together.

The spread of social media has facilitated e-mobilization (Earl and Kimport 2011), in which protest emerges first in the social media, i.e., online, and only later becomes an offline mobilization (Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar 2014). In such cases, the effects of social media on social movement formation and activity are more

pronounced than in cases in which online activity is used only to support offline activity. Our two protests illustrate these cases.

4. Israel: Education system, parent participation, and class

Following the logic of a quasi-social democratic state, the education system in Israel was founded in the 1950s as a centralized bureaucracy in which all aspects of primary public education (i.e., goals, financing, curriculum, staffing and employment, and assessment) were state-controlled.³ This structure formed the basis on which a monocentric and paternalist style of management developed.

During this period, registration zones were enforced and parent involvement was limited. But in the 1980s, drastic cutbacks in budget led to a “back door” privatization. Neoliberal ideas found their way into the education discourse and in such practices as autonomous schools, parental choice, and school-based management (Berkovich 2014). Initially implemented in a limited number of schools in the central metropolitan areas, these practices redrew the boundaries of legitimate parental involvement in education.

In the early 2000s, parent involvement in financing and curricular issues increased due to another wave of drastic cutbacks and the promotion of decentralization and consumer and performative accountability by several education ministers (Berkovich 2014; Yonah, Dahan, and Markovich 2008). Parents, mostly from the upper-middle class, began acting as “intrapreneurs” (Yemini, Ramot, and Sagie 2016) in public schools, initiating curricular changes and student selection mechanisms, at times funded with private money, and used their social and cultural

³ The public secondary education system is more decentralized because it developed in a patchy manner, and is considered to be less state-controlled, with schools being managed by local authorities and NGOs.

capitals to exploit loopholes in formal regulation and start autonomous semiprivate schools (Eyal 2008; Vurgan 2011).

Nonetheless, education policymaking remained largely monocentric and paternalist, and outside the reach of parents (with the exception of children with special needs and cases of inclusive education). Monocentric governance was preserved partly because the state succeeded in controlling the narrative in the media. But the dominance of institutional actors in the mass media changed with the rise of digital media, particularly social media, as evident in a successful 2007 teachers' mobilization against a state-initiated reform (Berkovich 2011).

Class is a much contested concept, and so is the way in which belonging to it is measured (Savage et al. 2013). Using the simple calculation of dividing Israeli households into income groups according to their distance from the median income, the Bank of Israel (2012) found that 40.7% of Israeli households belong to the working class, 26.6% to the lower-middle class, 22% to the upper-middle class, and 10.7% to the upper class. As in other countries, in Israel, class has a pronounced geographic aspect. Municipalities in the center of the country (the Tel Aviv metropolitan area) are dominated by the upper- and lower-middle classes, whereas peripheral municipalities are dominated by the working class (Bar 2010). Moreover, 69% of the municipalities belonging to the upper-middle class are located in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area or its outskirts (Bar 2010). The neoliberal shift that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s increased income differences between classes, particularly benefitting the upper and upper-middle classes (Swirski and Konor-Attias 2001). In recent years, local policy decisions guided by a neoliberal worldview, together with some international economic factors, have contributed to a decline in the real income of the middle and working classes, particularly affecting the younger generation. This

gloomy reality was an important impetus for the outbreak of a mass protest, referred to as “the social protest,” which in the summer of 2011 brought hundreds of thousands of Israelis, mostly of the middle classes, into the streets (Avigur-Eshel 2014).

5. A tale of two middle-class protests

The present study focuses on two cases of social activism by parents, in the form of e-mobilization (Earl and Kimport 2011): the Strollers Protest, in 2011, and the Sardines Protest, in 2014. These two cases share a few characteristics that make them well-suited for the aims of the present research:

- a) They were mobilizations in the cross-school arena, their main objective being to influence policies related to the public education system.
- b) Online activism was accompanied by offline activism.
- c) The protests were led by middle-class parents, mainly women.

The Strollers Protest was part of the wider “social protest” of the summer of 2011, which was itself part of a global wave of popular protests (Benski et al. 2013). A group of young middle-class women from Tel Aviv used this opportunity to promote the needs of working mothers and young families, specifically those concerned with early childhood education and caregiving. The initiative materialized following a public call issued by the group through the social media and mass media in late July, after the “social protest” demonstrations had already started.

The Sardines Protest had to do with the privatization of public education in Israel. Some schools have come to routinely use the parents’ money and municipal funding to split up over-crowded classes. Non-standard class size has been promoted primarily by well-off parents in wealthy municipalities. The Ministry of Education, which at first tacitly agreed to such an arrangement despite its illegality, decided to

enforce the prohibition against non-standard classes in early 2014. As a reaction, three mothers from the large middle-class city of Holon, in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area, opened a Facebook group called “The struggle to reduce crowding in classrooms.” The online protest picked up public momentum and eventually went offline during June of that year. The term “sardines” was used to describe how children were treated in a 40-student classroom, which was the education system standard class size.

Although both protests were middle-class-based, they differed in their class profile, as attested to by the socio-economic position of the municipalities in which demonstrations were held during the first week of offline activity in each case. We used the socio-economic ranking index of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) for the following analysis, in which cluster 1 includes the poorest municipalities and cluster 10 the wealthiest (CBS 2013).

In the Strollers case, municipalities were evenly spread across the fourth to eighth clusters of the CBS index. They were geographically located in both the center and the periphery of the country. In the Sardines case, municipalities were located in the sixth, seventh, and eighth clusters of the CBS index, and most of these municipalities were situated in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area or nearby. Consequently, the social base of support for the Strollers Protest was more heterogeneous from the point of view of class and geography, and included the lower- and upper-middle classes, whereas the Sardines protest was more homogeneous, supported almost exclusively by the relatively well-off parents of the upper-middle class.

Both protests used Facebook extensively. Facebook is the most popular social network in Israel,⁴ targeting a wider audience than niche sites such as LinkedIn. In early August 2011, the Facebook page of the Strollers had some 6,000 members, and in late June 2014, the Sardines' page had around 20,000. Therefore, we decided to use the Facebook pages as the main source of our empirical analysis.

We relied on qualitative methods to analyze both the use of social media as a resource (Guba's (1984) policy-in-action), and the policy ideas and frames disseminated through social media (Guba's policy-in-intention). The subjective interpretations of participants (Guba's policy-in-experience) fell outside the sphere of interest in the present study.

Although digital methods of controversy analysis are becoming popular (e.g., Marres 2015), we found them unsuitable for the current work for three reasons. First, these methods have been frequently applied to Twitter rather than Facebook (e.g., Marres and Moats 2015). Second, they require "grammar of action" details (shares, in the case of Facebook; Marres and Moats 2015) as input to the analysis, which were not available on Facebook during the earlier protest in 2011. Third, these methods reject the emphasis on social ontology prevalent in critical analysis because they aspire to "minimize" or even annihilate ontological assumptions (Marres 2015).

To inquire into the use of Facebook by activist parents, we analyzed qualitatively the posts and comments published on the official Facebook page of both protests. We used the literature on social media activism to construct our categorization of the text items. Six main types of uses have been suggested by the literature, which we named information exchange, coordination, discussion about

⁴ In 2011, Facebook users in Israel accounted for 47.14% of the total population (Israel Internet Association 2011); in 2013 they accounted for 49.38% of the total population (Kabir and Orbach 2013).

protest goals, call for action, reference to public representatives, and support/encouragement (Benkler et al. 2015; Gerbaudo 2012; Valenzuela 2013; Vatikiotis and Yörük 2016). Details of all categories are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of posts and comments.

Name	Description
Information exchange	Exchange of information about the location and timing of rallies.
Coordination	Communication between the central leadership and local leaders, with an organizational emphasis.
Discussion about goals	Comments on the protest goals and on real-world developments during the protest.
Call for action	Suggestions for action and urging to take specific action.
Reference to public representatives	Comments on elected representatives' actions and statements before and during the protest.
Support/encourage	General support for the protest, praise for activists, and information describing the achievements of the protest.

In collecting posts and comments we focused on the first week of combined online-offline activity based on the assumption that patterns of action determined during that initial phase profoundly affected future conduct.⁵ Posts and comments on the two Facebook pages were manually copied and archived. The texts were in Hebrew. We used administrators' posts (N=62) and users' comments (N=571) as the units of analysis. Posts are the main tool on Facebook for the leadership to communicate with activists, supporters, and the general public; comments are the tools used by activists and supporters to communicate with each other, the leadership, and the public. In analyzing comments we follow a recommendation made by Kosinski et al. (2015) that data retrieved from Facebook may be used for research

⁵ The data on the Strollers were collected between July 27, 2011 and August 2, 2011. The data on the Sardines were collected between June 20, 2014 and June 27, 2014, excluding one day (June 21) in which there was no online activity.

purposes without users' consent, on condition that it is anonymized. We did not apply this recommendation to posts, because they were all published by a public group, namely the movement leadership.

The categorization of posts and comments was conducted by the two authors, and the analysis was inspired, as noted, by the relevant theoretical and empirical literature. To refine the analysis, the authors discussed the coding along the way, and each author reviewed the other's work of categorization. In general, high degree of agreement emerged between the two coders, and the few disagreements were discussed until an agreement was reached.

To address the second aim of the study, which was to determine the type of policies promoted by the protests (anti- or pro-neoliberal), we used the official Facebook page as the main source for identifying the demands of the two protests and the way in which they were framed. We relied on complementary sources as well: newspaper articles and protocols of meetings of committees in the Israeli parliament (Knesset) devoted to the two protests. We first examined the list of demands and determined the degree to which they were compatible with central neoliberal principles. In our context, these principles are: (a) awarding primacy to market mechanisms and private initiative in the provision and funding of social services, and (b) minimal involvement of the state, expressed in decentralization and in a subsidiary role in service provision and funding (Avigur-Eshel 2014; Berkovich 2014). Next, we looked at how these demands were framed, adopting Entman's (1993) view of framing as a process of selection, emphasis, and elaboration, and Benford and Snow's (2000) view of framing as a tool for motivating mobilization. We employed critical discourse analysis to produce insights into the social representations of protest as constructed by the two leaderships (Van Dijk 1993). We paid particular attention to

uncovering the ideologies, premises, and aims behind statements made by the leaderships (Titscher et al. 2000).

For the sake of disclosure, note that the two authors actively participated in the 2011 “social protest” and supported many of the demands raised during that period by popular forces, including those of the Strollers, but neither of them took part in the Strollers Protest itself. We discussed these issues and made a conscious and continuous effort to criticize our own findings and interpretations. Therefore, we are confident that our analysis was not drastically influenced by our past personal involvement.

6. Social media activism of Israeli middle-class parents

Although they shared some important contextual features, the two protests differed markedly in their use of social media, in the demands they put forward, and in their framing. The Strollers used Facebook to mobilize participants from various social classes, and articulated anti-neoliberal claims. The Sardines used Facebook to mobilize the upper-middle class and harness the support of other classes for the realization of their group interests. Additionally, they articulated claims that resonated with neoliberal ideas.

6.1. Social media as resource

For both protests, their official Facebook page served as an important platform on which to build resources, but in different manners. Indeed, both protests made considerable use of Facebook to express support and encouragement (Table 1) by the leadership, activists, and supporters. The leadership encouraged activists by posting links to articles in the mass media that seemed to provide evidence of the success of

the protest. For example, the Sardines leadership published a link to a news story in a daily economic newspaper, titled “About 300 parents in Tel Aviv and hundreds more in Netanya protested against crowded classrooms” (Sardines 2014a). Activists encouraged one another: “Way to go for the initiative... [we are] with you all the way” (Facebook User 1 2011). Supporters used the Facebook page to express their appreciation of the actions of the leadership and activists: “Way to go! Don’t give up! Don’t give up!!! They will ignore you, so that you give up. Don’t!” (Facebook User 2 2014). But, aside from this category, the Strollers and the Sardines derived markedly different resources from their use of the Facebook platform because of the properties of their protest.

The Strollers used Facebook as a resource for mobilizing supporters from different classes. After publicizing their call for a “Strollers’ Protest” through the social media and the mass media, the leadership was concerned mainly with coordinating the activities of local activists. A typical example is: “Dear organizers of marches in various cities – we need your mobile number for the news media that want to come to report. Please email us with the details as soon as possible. Thanks!” (Strollers 2011a). This allowed ample maneuvering room for actors who did not necessarily share the class background of the leading figures. Another indication of this networked organizational structure is that supporters and activists used Facebook mainly to exchange information, for example: “Does anyone know when and where the march is in [the city of] Rishon?” (Facebook User 3 2011), and “[the city of] Ashkelon, today at 17:30, near the central bus station” (Facebook User 4 2011). Other uses, such as discussion of goals, call for action, and reference to public representatives were much less common.

The Sardines used Facebook as a resource for mobilizing a certain group that was affected by the decision of the Ministry of Education concerning non-standard classes. Unlike the Strollers' leadership, the Sardine's leadership initiated calls for action rather frequently: "Options for action: ... We assume that you are part of many Facebook groups. Paste on these groups' walls a link to our struggle page and ask them to give us a Like" (Sardines 2014a). This snowball recruitment method, which exploits existing social ties, has higher chances of success than an open call, but it is also susceptible to a common tendency among social media users to interact with those sharing a similar social background (Zuckerman 2014). Because class forms a crucial part of this background (Tigges, Browne, and Green 1998), the recruitment process is likely to result in an intra-class pattern rather than an inter-class one.

Two other categories common among the Sardines, discussion of goals and reference to public representatives, attest to class-group particularism. Discussions of goals were generally *not* concerned with changing protest goals, negotiating them, or adding new ones, but rather with infusing more meaning into the basic goal of reducing the number of students per class. This practice allowed potential supporters to express their discontent over the decision of the Ministry of Education, and by doing so, align themselves with the protest: "It just doesn't make sense to assemble 40 students in one classroom, there's just not enough physical room for so many!!!" (Facebook User 5 2014). Reference to public representatives also became a tool for consolidating upper-middle class support. The leadership and activists either praised politicians who expressed support for the protest or criticized others, mainly the Minister of Education, whom they held responsible: "The burden of proof is on you – when you took office you shouted that you are here to make a change [but as others, you learned] only to make headlines" (Facebook User 6 2014). Once again, this

practice served primarily to mobilize and crystallize the support of those who saw themselves as directly harmed, namely the upper-middle class.

6.2. Framing demands

The demands presented by the two protests were the opposite of one another: the Strollers articulated anti-neoliberal demands, whereas the Sardines were in agreement with the neoliberal worldview. Nevertheless, both framed their protest in universal terms, claiming that all parents stood to benefit from achieving the protest goals.

The demands of the two protests were formulated early in the mobilization process and did not change substantially later. They diverged significantly in scope: the Strollers' demands aimed for a considerable change, whereas the Sardines' aimed for a limited and well-defined one. But the main difference lies in their contrasting stance with regard to the main neoliberal tenets. The Strollers' main demands were transformative. Their realization would signify a move away from neoliberalism in education and welfare policies, because it would increase state involvement in the provision of social services, undermining market mechanisms. The main demands, as stated on their Facebook page, were:

1. Mandatory Free Education Law from the age of three months.
2. Price control on basic baby products, such as breast milk substitutes and diapers.
3. Expansion of maternity leave for women and institutionalization of paternity leave for men (Strollers, n.d.).

By contrast, the Sardines' main demands were conservative and addressed the decision of the Ministry of Education to prohibit non-standard class sizes. These demands advocated the restoration of a previous state of affairs, in which richer municipalities and parents could allocate additional funds to improve the study conditions of their children (fewer students per class) in state-funded schools. This agenda was consistent with neoliberal principles of decentralization, private initiative, and a minimal state. Demands were phrased in a formalistic way that emphasized procedural issues:

1. In [the next school year] the government resolution of 2008... will be implemented: there will not be more than 32 students per class.
2. As of [the next school year] all transversal hours [i.e., division of organic classrooms for teaching specific subjects] that had been cut will be restored" (Sardines 2014b).

Table 2 compares the views of the two protest leaderships on various issues, as reflected in their demands, pointing to pro- and anti-neoliberal stances.

Table 2. Comparison of the views of the protest leaderships, as reflected in their demands.

	Strollers Protest Anti-neoliberal stance	Sardines Protest Pro-neoliberal stance
(De-)Centralization	Centralization	De-centralization
Funding of education	Predominantly by the state	Predominantly by the municipal authorities and the parents
Desired main role of the state	Provider of services	Regulator of services

Framing was used in both protests to construct a broad collective of supporters, a "we," with an emphasis on injustice (Gamson 1992). But differences

emerged in the manner in which the “we” was constructed and in the content of the injustice frame, which have to do at least partly with differences in articulated demands. The Strollers presented their protest as the struggle of all parents, particularly parents of young children, with a central concern for women. In the first lines of the “struggle objectives” document posted on the official Facebook page, the collective is defined as “families [that] can’t make ends meet.” No less indicative of the attempt to universalize the protest, this message is followed by a comment that “Arabic, English, and Russian [versions] follow the Hebrew one” (Strollers, n.d.). The appeal to language groups, especially to two large peripheral groups, the Arab-speaking national minority and immigrants from the former USSR, attests to the conscious attempt to mobilize a variety of middle- and working-class groups.

Injustice was framed as the inability of parents to raise properly their babies and young children because of acute economic hardships (Strollers 2011b). As the protest progressed, injustice was framed in clear anti-neoliberal terms:

We [came to] understand that... this is not fate and that we are not to blame for the situation, but the predatory economic policy pursued by all Israeli governments in the last 20 years. It is a policy whereby the economy does not serve society, but society serves the economy, which is not free, but belongs to a handful of rich people backed by the state... (Strollers 2011c).

Notwithstanding this universal framing of injustice as affecting all parents, the middle class was the special focus of the framing efforts. Following the phrase quoted above, the July 31 post argued that “[t]he middle class carries most of the economic, security, and professional burden[s], and it demands benefit from the welfare [can be

read as wellbeing] as much as it shares the burden” (Strollers 2011b). During a meeting of the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women, one of the protest leaders argued: “the division of the tax burden must be changed because we are talking here about the middle class and the middle class pays a lot of taxes and then pays again” (Knesset 2011).

In the Sardines' case, the framing of the “we” and of the nature of injustice changed during the protest, indicating a transition from class-centered to hegemonic practices—what Gramsci (1971, 106) termed the construction of “intellectual and moral leadership,” i.e., attempts by a dominant group to build an inter-class coalition for the fulfillment of its interests based on consent. Early in the process of mobilization, the struggling collective was framed as consisting of upper-middle-class families affected by the decision of the Ministry of Education: “You [plural] and us, parents against the Ministry of Education’s decision to break up entire age cohorts [in school] in order to create a new redistribution of 40-student classes” (Sardines 2014, May 17). Concomitantly and not unrelated, injustice was framed as a wrongdoing against families living in richer municipalities, where non-standard classes had been banned by the decision of the Ministry. As an early Facebook post stated, the implementation of the decision of the Ministry is “for our children a direct hit aimed at a safe and familiar routine, (relatively) decent learning conditions, friendships that have been created over the years...” (Sardines 2014, May 17). This statement echoes previous research that has identified the semi-privatized public education as a unique niche in the education market, which middle-class parents, aspiring for a more exclusive environment for their children, away from “dangerous” (read, lower class) students, find attractive (Saltman 2000).

It was only after criticism from various public figures, including journalists, academics, and policymakers, that the Sardines' leadership embarked on extending the framework (Benford and Snow 2000). The new framing was intended to increase the legitimacy of the protest and draw support from the lower-middle class and the working class: "We, parents of students in all elementary schools, along with all citizens of Israel..." (Sardines 2014c). Injustice was understood as inequality in public education. From their perspective, the Sardines were simply asking to be treated as equals with other groups. But their use of the term was misleading because it concealed their aspiration to preserve an unequal state of affairs. The leadership proclaimed that their demands, primarily limiting classes to 32 students, will be "implemented in a uniform and equal manner and will apply to any girl and boy in the State of Israel studying in public institutions" (Sardines 2014b). But the equality implied in this statement was one in which the state was expected to support poorer municipalities through public funding, while richer municipalities were free to continue investing private and municipal funding in public schools. The following statement by the chairman of a parent committee in an affluent regional council during a session of the Knesset Education Committee dedicated to the Sardines protest is particularly telling:

Don't bring down those who have succeeded in achieving a particular [level of] education... and say – you too [will] have 40 students in the classroom, rather say to those below – let's push you upward. [Applause in the meeting room]. Equality... begins by not hurting any group and bringing it down, but by identifying the points of weakness... (Knesset 2014).

Explicit neoliberal ideas or expressions were absent from the Sardines' framing efforts, but they did leave their clear imprint. The framing of both the collective struggle and of the injustice exposed two inherent tensions that promoters of neoliberal policies typically encounter: duality in the treatment of the state (here, the Minister of Education) and the deepening of distributional conflicts (here, in the provision of "human capital") (Centeno and Cohen 2012). First, the state was held responsible for correcting injustice, but at the same time it could not be relied upon to provide a satisfactory solution, so that eventually private and municipal funding would be required. Second, the Sardines turned to hegemonic practices when framing their protest because the realization of their demands would have an unequal distributional consequence—in this case, in educational outcomes—of benefitting a particular, well-defined, and affluent group.

7. Conclusion

Our research makes two contributions to the study of parent activism in education. First, it shows that social media provides new tools for parents to participate in the across-schools or policy arena. Consistent with previous studies, we found that social media is a tool that activists can use in a variety of ways (Earl and Kimport 2011). We also found that in both protests, activists and supporters were drawn only from the middle classes (upper and lower). This is consistent with findings whereby rising material inequality is associated with rising inequality in political participation (Harriss 2006; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Because political participation demands attention, energy, and social capital (Berger 2011; Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 1994), some of which are directly linked to working conditions (i.e., time and income), rising inequality is likely to increase the gap between poorer and more

affluent citizens, and negatively affect the democratic equality principle. We therefore consider that the persistence of the neoliberal mode of governance, with its socio-economic externalities, will contribute to the entrenchment of this gap. Our findings are also consistent with the tendency of social media to reinforce group differences in society, particularly class differences (Zuckerman 2014). Future parent activists will likely face similar challenges in overcoming class boundaries in the formation of social movements, supplemented by new challenges in using Facebook as a resource for mobilization because of changes in its architecture, particularly the algorithmic news-feed that relies on extensive data mining (Tufekci 2016). The second contribution is showing that social media can be used to promote contradictory worldviews regarding the relations between citizens and the state in education. This is particularly important for scholars of sociology of education and education policy because the neoliberalization of education is often seen by scholars as a state-led or business elite-led project. In this view, non-elite actors using social media and other means are seen only as forces of resistance. We have shown that non-elite middle class actors can also act to promote neoliberalization.

The two contributions of the study can be combined to produce a complex assessment of future developments. Both the neoliberal mode of governance and the segmenting effect of social media work to compartmentalize society in multiple ways. Social groups, particularly classes, may be increasingly drawn apart from one another to produce a fragmented society, which would serve the neoliberal agenda. At the same time, shared experiences of declining material conditions and of exposure to the commodifying effects of market practices in education, together with the advocacy functions provided to education policy activists by social media, may lead to a

lowering of inter-group boundaries and the destabilisation of neoliberal governance in education.

The study has several limitations. First, caution should be exercised when comparing Facebook protests from two different periods. As an innovative tool for political purposes, Facebook was initially open mostly to early adopters and technologically savvy users (Borah 2016). Only in recent years has Facebook reframed its service as a central hub where individuals can satisfy their social, news, and political needs (Vraga et al. 2016), particularly in Israel. We attempted to overcome these differences by the choice of data and methods of coding and analysis, yet we must acknowledge their existence. Second, we did not explore online government action to promote its policies or to counter parent activism. Research has addressed the increasing use of the Internet by governments as a structured path to “engage” parents with schools and education (e.g., the Australian MySchool website; Lee and Lee 2015). Despite these shortcomings, this innovative study shows that social media activism in education is becoming a central phenomenon in 21st century education policymaking. The question that remains open is what types of uses and purposes will prevail.

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